

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year Application made for Second-Class Entry at N. Y. Post-Office.

No. 13.

NEW YORK, JANUARY 16, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST'S TRIUMPH: OR, WINNING AGAINST GREAT ODDS.

By AN OLD SCOUT.

W. J. MILLER,
PUBLISHER IN CHARGE & EDITOR



Before anyone knew what was up, he fired a shot at Young Wild West, which missed him and struck the chairman of the committee who was looking over his shoulder at the time.

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CHAPTER I.

GETTING READY FOR THE COWBOY CARNIVAL.

"Wild," said pretty Arietta Murdock, as Young Wild West entered the post office. "I see by the Spondulicks Sentinel that they are going to have a big time over there on Thanksgiving Day. The city officials have made up a purse and are going to give prizes for the best horsemanship, shooting, etc. It costs fifty dollars for one to enter, and the money collected in that way goes to the winner and the second and third man. There are also a few events open to the ladies."

"Is that so, Et?" and the handsome, athletic boy of nineteen brushed his long, chestnut locks over his shoulders and reached for the paper the postmistress tendered him.

It was a fine morning in the middle of November. The bracing air of the Black Hills was just cool enough to make the wearing of a coat a necessity. It was just the day to cheer the most despondent mortal and inspire him to think that life was still worth the living.

Young Wild West was certainly the greatest hero the Wild West had ever known.

There was not a person who knew him who could truthfully say that he had ever committed a wrong action in his life.

True, he had made more than one Indian and bad white man bite the dust from his unerring aim, and in those days such things had to be done in that region in order that honest people might live and thrive.

Wild was a firm believer that every one ought to dress as well as they could afford to, and as he was worth considerable from his rich strike in the hills some months previous, and was making money right along through the Wild West Mining and Improvement Company, of Weston, he practiced what he believed in.

He invariably wore what is termed a hunting suit, and on this morning he was attired in fancy high-topped boots, buckskin knee-breeches trimmed with green fringe, blue silk embroidered shirt, corduroy coat and a white sombrero with a blue silk band around it.

In his belt were a brace of revolvers of the latest make, and a keen-edged hunting knife—articles that he seldom went out of the house without.

Wild read the article in the newspaper carefully, and then handing it back to Arietta, said:

"What do you say if we go over and try for some of those prizes, Et? Let me see, Thanksgiving is a week from Thursday, isn't it?"

"Yes; a week from the day after to-morrow. Well, Wild, to tell the truth, I was hoping you would decide to go over

to Spondulicks on that day. I know that Anna would like to go, and if you say the word, all hands will go. Jim, Charlie and Jack ought to win at least a prize apiece. You, of course, will come out first in every event you enter."

"Don't be too sure of that. I haven't practiced any fancy feats of horsemanship in some time, and there might be others who are able to teach me something in that line. As for shooting, I suppose I can hold my own with the best of them."

"Well, you can take the paper and show it to the rest, then. When I go home to dinner I will tell Anna, Eloise and Martha. They will be delighted, I am sure."

"All right, sweetheart. We will settle it right now by saying that we will go and compete for the prizes in the big time over in Spondulicks. It says in the paper that all the entries must be in by the day before. We have plenty of time to decide what we want to go in, but I suppose we ought to do it as soon as possible, so as to have a chance to practice."

"Yes, of course."

Young Wild West's handsome sorrel stallion was outside, tied to the hitching post, and waving a kiss to the girl he hoped to marry when he got old enough, he mounted and rode off.

He had ridden the horse about five miles that morning, just to give the spirited animal a little exercise, and had stopped at the post office on his way back home.

Weston was one of the most hustling and best regulated towns of its size in the West.

As yet it had no real town officers, but an honest-hearted pioneer named Dove-Eyed Dave was regarded as a sort of mayor, and with the advice of Young Wild West, he managed to run things in a way that suited all the honest residents.

It was more than probable that at no distant day there would be an election held and a full set of town officers elected to run the place in a systematic way, like Spondulicks and other larger towns were run.

Judge Lynch invariably took care of the murderers, horse thieves, etc., and his rulings were generally satisfactory to every one but the evil-doer himself.

Wild rode up to the door of the office of the company he was treasurer of, and dismounting, turned his horse over to the darky who was there for the purpose, and went inside.

A rousing wood fire was burning in the big round stove to keep off the chill, and seated about it were Jim Dart, Cheyenne Charlie, Jack Robedee and Dove-Eye Dave.

At a desk not far from the stove was the book-keeper of

the concern, Rex Moore, a young man who had lately come from the East.

"Well, boys," said Wild, as he took a seat in a vacant chair, there is going to be a lively time over at Spondulicks Thanksgiving Day. The Sentinel has got a full column about it this week."

"What's up?" asked Jim Dart, looking at his chum expectantly.

"Oh, the officials over there have raised quite a pile of money, and they are going to give it away in prizes to competitors. There are about ten first prizes, and as many seconds, as well as thirds. The entrance fee is fifty dollars for each one who goes in."

"Yes; but what must a fellow do to win one of the prizes?" asked Cheyenne Charlie, pulling his long mustache and looking interestedly at our hero.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you that. The prizes will be given for the best feats of horsemanship, racing, shooting and the like. It will be a regular Cowboy Carnival, so the paper says."

"If that is the case we ought to go over and take a hack at it," spoke up Jack Robedee.

"Well, what do you say if we go over?" and Young Wild West looked at his partners interrogatively.

"A good suggestion."

"Certainly."

"Just the thing."

"I'll be jiggered if I don't almost feel young enough to go inter ther game myself."

The last was said by Dove-Eye Dave, and he got up and straightened up to show that he was not ready to quit yet.

"Well, Jim, just read the list of events to us, and then we will decide on which we will enter," remarked Wild, as he tossed the paper over to the secretary of the company.

Jim read them all over carefully before any one said a word.

Then he started in again, and they began to pick out what they liked.

Wild decided to go in the rough and ready riding contest, the two-mile riding race, and the shooting match while riding at full speed.

Wild decided to go in the rough-and-ready riding contest, Cheyenne Charlie said he was not afraid to go in the lariat swinging game, and Jack Robedee concluded to try his luck in the foot race.

"That's all right," said Wild, nodding in a satisfied manner. "Now, how about the girls? Et wants to go in, and she says she is sure Anna does."

"Well, according to this paper, there is only one contest

for them to get in," replied Jim. "It says that a first, second and third prize will be given to the ladies who excel in riding and shooting. I suppose that means that they will have to do some of both."

"Exactly. Well, put down Et and Anna, then. They ought to be able to show some of the women in this part of the country what they can do. Rex, just write down the events we want to enter and fix it up in proper shape. We will all sign them, and I'll send them over with the money by the next stage."

"Very well," answered the book-keeper. "If you will tell me, one at a time, I will write out the applications for entries in regular form, at least, the way we do it in the East."

In a few minutes he had done this, after which the four stepped up and signed their names.

Wild took Arietta's and Charlie took his wife's to get them to sign them.

Both Et and Anna were excellent rifle shots, and they could ride with the best of them.

It now became the duty of our hero and Charlie to learn them something new, so they would stand a show to win a prize.

The applications, with the necessary fees, were sent over to the proper parties in Spondulicks the following morning, and then our friends started in to get themselves in shape for the contest.

The weather was pretty good for the balance of the week, and they practiced every day.

There was not a possible thing that could be done in that line that Wild did not do, and the rest took their lessons from him.

Jim was an excellent rifle shot, from any distance up to a thousand yards, and he pulled himself in great shape the first day.

Jack had beaten everything down at Fort Bridger at running foot races when he was located there as a Government scout.

He was good at any distance, but a hundred yard dash was his best forte.

And Cheyenne Charlie was fully the equal of Young Wild West at throwing a lasso. He could do it riding at full speed or standing still in a fixed position.

It certainly looked as though our friends would show them a thing or two when the Cowboy Carnival took place.

A couple of days before Thanksgiving two strangers appeared in Weston.

They were of the flashy sort, and displayed no end of jewelry.

Our friends were engaged in practice on the level tract

just south of the office, when Young Wild West noticed the two strange men watching them with interest.

It occurred to him all of a sudden that they were there to get a line on what they were doing.

He gave the word to quit doing all difficult feats, and though his companions did not know what for, they obeyed.

Then they proceeded to ride around in circles and curves, and five minutes later they quit altogether.

Wild had given his reason to Charlie for stopping, and the scout had passed it along to the rest.

"I don't like the looks of those fellows," said our hero, when they were putting away their horses. "It occurred to me that they had come here to get a line on what we proposed to do at the carnival, and I could not get myself to think any other way. I am glad we were really not doing anything difficult when they came."

"We had better take a walk about town after supper, an' mebbe we kin find out somethin' about 'em," observed Jack Robedee.

"That's right," nodded Jim; "but we had better not all go together. You and I will take a walk around and Wild and Charlie can do the same. We will meet on the way back."

"That is a very good idea!" exclaimed Young Wild West.

After supper they started out as Jim had suggested.

Wild and Charlie walked directly over to the Gazoo hotel and Jim and Jack went over to the supply store.

Proprietor Brown, of the Gazoo, welcomed our hero and his companion warmly.

He was running quite a respectable place, and though his hotel was not the largest, it certainly was the best one in Weston.

Wild treated the few who happened to be in the barroom, and then turning to Brown, said:

"Have you seen anything of the two flashily dressed strangers we have in town?"

"Oh, yes," was the reply. "They have been here several times. They said they were going over to the office to see you this afternoon. Did they come?"

"Well, they came over, sure enough, but they did not say a word to me, or any of the rest. They watched us training for the carnival until we quit, and that was the last we saw of them."

"They were very much interested in ther doin's over at Spondulicks. They asked me if there was much betting money in this town, an' I told 'em that depended on what ther bettin' was about. They asked all about you and wanted to know if it was true that you'd never been beat at ridin' an' shootin', an' I answered 'em that as far as I knowed.

it was true. Then one of 'em says, 'Young Wild West will find his match when he gets at work over in Spondulicks ther day after ter-morrer, see if he don't.'

"Did he want to bet on that?" asked Wild.

"Yes; he wanted to an' did, 'cause I took him up for five hundred that you wouldn't find your match at ridin' or shootin' at ther carnival. We put up ther money, an' it is in ther hands of ther supply store man."

"Well, I will try and see to it that you win your bet, Mr. Brown. I am going to Spondulicks the day after to-morrow with the intention of winning every event I go in. If I don't it won't be because I didn't try hard."

"Oh, I ain't worried about losin' my money," was the confident rejoinder. "I asked ther men who was liable to knock you out, an' they said there were several there who would likely do it; but one feller in particular, whose name was Fancy Phil. He's ther boss of ther saddle in ther State of Texas, they said, an' that ought to be a guarantee that he was worth bettin' on. They—— Hello! There they come now, an' they are headin' straight here!"

CHAPTER II.

SOME PRETTY LARGE WAGERS.

The two strangers were coming, sure enough. They walked right up to the door and entered, familiarly addressing Brown as they did so.

"Give us all some fluid lightning," exclaimed one of them, who was a big man weighing as much as two hundred and fifty pounds.

There were seven in the barroom, all told, and Brown, who was behind the bar himself, put out a whiskey bottle and six glasses.

"Another glass," said the big man, who was watching closely. "There are seven of us here, I reckon."

Brown hesitated and looked at Wild.

The boy nodded for him to put out the extra glass.

He could see what was coming.

It was the same old game that had been tried on him by o many, and had failed as many times as it had been tried.

The man had most surely learned that he did not drink anything strong, and he was insisting that he should drink, just to have a little fun.

Brown knew what was going to happen, too, for he had told both the men that Young Wild West did not drink whiskey.

But he put out the seventh glass, and then the men began to pour out their drinks.

Cheyenne Charlie took a drink occasionally, and when

the bottle came to him he poured out a small quantity of the whiskey and sat the bottle on the bar.

"Go ahead, young fellow, and take a drink," said the big man, stepping over and pushing the bottle in front of Wild.

"No, thanks, I never touch it," replied our hero, speaking in a very civil tone of voice.

"What! You are the fellow they call Young Wild West, if I am not mistaken. And you don't drink, eh? Pshaw! Well, I am not going to try to force you."

Wild, who was just a little angered at the man, walked over toward the door without a word, and Cheyenne Charlie placed his glass on the bar, untasted.

"I won't drink, either," exclaimed the scout. "I thought I was being addressed by a gentleman when you asked me to have a drink, but a gentleman don't insult people by asking them to drink jest because he knows ther person he asks never touches whiskey."

That was the best way Charlie could express himself, but he was understood perfectly.

"See here," spoke up the man who had not said anything until now, "if I know anything about it, it is you who are doing the insulting. Don't imagine that because we don't wear cowboy rigs that we don't know our business. I was born and bred in Colorado, and I guess I know what I am doing."

To show that he meant business, he placed his hand on his hip pocket.

"Well, stranger, if you know your business, you had better slide your hand away from where you've got it, and be mighty quick about it, too!"

"Are you afraid I'll shoot you?" and the man laughed as though he thought it a good joke, drawing his hand away at the same time, though.

"I don't think there is any use for all this talk," said Wild, walking back to the center of the room. "If there is any particular thing that you strangers want, out with it!"

"I wanted you to drink, that's all," answered the big man.

"And I didn't want to."

"That's about the way it stands, I guess. But come, if you don't want to drink, have a cigar."

"I don't care for anything just now; so please let it drop."

"Young Wild West, you are about the most impudent boy I have ever seen. You may be good at shooting and riding wild horses, but you are very much lacking in manners."

"You think so, eh? Well, now just tell me who you are, so I may know of the man who has got such an opinion of me as that."

"Oh, my name is Daniel Dodge—Dodger Dan they call me for short—and this is my friend, Silas Hodge."

"Hodge-podge! A case of Dodge, eh? Well, you just apologize for what you said I was just now, or there will be some dodging around here for fair! Do you hear that, Dodger Dan and Silas Hodge?"

The two men were actually astonished at this. It was quite evident that they had not believed what they had been told about Young Wild West, and had been trying to have some fun at his expense.

But now they began to realize that they had made a slight mistake.

But neither of them were what might be termed cowards, and they did not propose to crawl.

They both drew their revolvers with remarkable quickness, but they did not get the muzzles leveled at anything above the floor before they saw that they were covered.

"Why don't you go on an' shoot?" asked Cheyenne Charlie, sarcastically.

"You've got the drop on us," was Hodge's answer. "We are not exactly fools."

"You said I was the most impudent boy I had ever seen, and that I was very much lacking in manners, Mr. Dodger Dan," remarked Wild, speaking as coolly as though he was talking to a friend in a joking way. "I want to know if you are of that opinion yet?"

"No! I'll take it back. I only said it just to get you riled. I wanted to find out what kind of stuff you were made of. Come, let's drop this business and be friends. I came over to Weston just for the purpose of sizing you up, and I am satisfied now that you are just what I was told you were."

"Yes; so am I," chimed in the other man. "Give us the best you have in the house, landlord. Throw out your good cigars, too. Young Wild West is welcome to a dozen of them, if he likes."

Cheyenne Charlie was for not accepting the invitation, but Wild shot a glance at him which meant that they would not antagonize the poor fools any further; so he walked up to the bar.

The look on the face of Brown showed that he was very much relieved.

He did not like the idea of shooting taking place in his house, as it made things disagreeable, and there was usually considerable of a muss to clean up.

"I understand, Mr. West, that you have entered into the carnival sports over in Spondulicks on Thanksgiving Day," said Dodger Dan, when things seemed to be running along smooth again.

"Yes," replied Wild, "we are going over to try our luck."

"Well, if you win any of the events you will have to hustle, for some of the best men in the West will be pitted against you—men who have practiced that sort of thing for years."

"I suppose the odds will be against me, but that won't stop me from doing my best."

"Well, Hodge and I have looked it over carefully, and with all due respect to you, we have come to the conclusion that a Texan named Fancy Phil will carry off the first prize in the rough-and-ready riding contest. We are backing him with our money, so if you know any one who wants to bet against him, we will be glad to accommodate him."

"See here, Mr. Dodge, I'll make a proposition to you. We are going to build a school-house here in Weston. There are so many people coming here with their families of children that it is something we have got to have. The building will cost about two thousand dollars when it is completed, and I don't mind giving you a chance to pay for it. I will put up two thousand dollars in the hands of Brown here, and you do the same. If your favorite, Fancy Phil, wins the rough-and-ready riding contest you get your money back, and what I put up goes to build the school-house; if I should win I get my money back and yours builds the school-house. I am backing myself against a man I don't know, and never saw, but I am willing to take my chances. What do you say to my proposition?"

"What do I say! Why, I accept it, of course. I'll put my money up right now."

"All right; so will I."

They each counted out two thousand dollars, and gave it to Brown, who repeated the terms of the wager, so there would be no mistake on his part.

"This ain't no regular bet," he said. "It is jest puttin' up security to see who is goin' to pay for the new school-house. Ther winner gits his money back, an' ther loser has ther satisfaction that his money has gone for a good purpose."

"That's it exactly," exclaimed Young Wild West.

"Well, now that it is all understood, an' ther money is up, I'll jest bet you a thousand dollars that Dodger Dan pays for ther buildin' of ther school-house," said Cheyenne Charlie, turning to Silas Hodge.

"I'll take you, partner!" and out came his bag of dust.

Brown, of course, was selected stake-holder, and when he got the money in his hands, he observed:

"Now, this is a regular bet. There's no need to go into any details about it. If Young Wild West has to pay for ther buildin' of ther school buildin', Silas Hodge gits this

two thousand dollars, an' if Dodger Dan is compelled to do ther payin', Cheyenne Charlie gits ther two thousand. That's very easy understood."

Just as Dodger Dan was asking if there were any others present who wanted to bet on Young Wild West, Jim Dart and Jack Robedee came into the Gazoo.

They had made the rounds without meeting the strangers, of course, and had brought up at Brown's.

"I don't know what the bet is, but I'll take some of it!" cried Jim, stepping up to the big man.

The big man seemed somewhat amazed at a stranger speaking to him, but was pleased that some one would take him up.

"Well, I'll tell you, then, young fellow. Young Wild West has just backed himself to win over a Texan named Fancy Phil in the rough-and-ready riding match that will take place at the Cowboy Carnival in Spondulicks the day after to-morrow. How much do you want to bet that your friend will win?"

"Well, I don't believe in betting to any great extent, but I will cover any amount that you lay on the bar in this case."

"Thank you. You are a true sport, you are," and with a laugh Dodger Dan pulled out a bag from his pocket and laid it on the bar.

"There is five thousand dollars in gold in that," he added. "Do you want to cover that much?"

"Yes."

Like Wild, Jim and the others had come prepared for something like this. They usually did not carry much money with them, but everything pointed as though there would be some betting going on.

The fact of the strangers watching them while they were at practice was sufficient to make them think this way.

Jim put up the money right away, and when Brown had counted both piles and found them right, he hesitated.

"I don't like to hold so large an amount of money," he said. "S'pose somethin' should happen?"

"You have got a safe, haven't you?" asked Wild.

"Oh, yes; that part of it is all right. But s'pose I should take it in my head an' run away?"

"I'll run that risk," said Dodger Dan, with a laugh.

The two men seemed to have no end of money with them, and several smaller bets were made among the admirers of Young Wild West.

But one thing Wild knew for a certainty, and that was that if he won it would be against great odds, for Dodger Dan and Silas Hodge would most likely do everything they could to prevent him from winning.

CHAPTER III.

A LIVELY TIME IN SPONDULICKS.

Thanksgiving Day dawned bright and clear.

Young Wild West's party set out at eight o'clock in the morning for Spondulicks.

It consisted of Wild and Arietta, Jim and Eloise, Cheyenne Charlie and his wife, Anna, Jack Robedee and Martha, and Lively Rick and his girl.

The latter couple had come over from Devil Creek on purpose to go with their friends.

They could have made a shorter cut to Spondulicks, as did several of the people who went from there, but they wanted to be in the company of Young Wild West.

Rick stated that there were three or four entries in the events from men from the Creek, but as he took little interest in things over there, outside of his girl and the paying claim he owned, he did not have any idea what chance they had of winning.

There were at least fifty who went over there besides our friends. Some went on horsback and some went by stages. Weston was bound to be well represented at the ~~Cowboy~~ Carnival.

But, strange as it may seem, our friends were the only ones who had seen fit to enter into any of the events from their town.

And every man who went over was ready to back Young Wild West to win every event he took part in.

That was an evidence of the opinion they had of him.

Wild and Arietta led the procession, going at an easy gait.

They did not want to tire their horses, and as the carnival did not begin till two o'clock, they would have ample time to rest and get dinner before it started.

Our hero advised his companions to keep a good lookout on the way, as there was no telling what might happen.

It was a common thing for road agents and outlaws to hang around that section of the country, although all those who had operated there so far had been put out of business by Wild and his friends.

Just how it was he could not tell, but our hero felt that they were going to meet with some one to antagonize them before they got into Spondulicks.

Just as they reached the fork where the right road went on to the foothills and the prairie beyond, a shot suddenly rang out, and a bullet whizzed past the ear of Young Wild West, scorching the rim of his hat.

"I thought so," he muttered, with a nod that was half

satisfaction, half surprise. "That fellow wanted me, whoever he was."

The echoes of the report had not died away when every man in the party was straining his eyes to locate where it came from.

Wild rode close under a ledge at the roadside, so a shot could not reach him, provided it came from the same direction as the other one had, and dismounted.

The others followed suit.

"Just stay here a little while; I'm going out to see if I can't find the fellow that fired that shot," he said. "The last time I had a shot fired at me like that I soon found who did it, and we settled the matter satisfactorily. I think there is just one man hidden up there somewhere, and I'm going to hunt him up."

The boy started to climb the rocky ascent as he finished speaking, and in half a minute he was lost to sight.

He knew just about where the shot had been fired from. There was a clump of rocks well up on the mountain side at a distance of probably a thousand feet.

That was where he judged the shot to come from.

If he was right he certainly had his man cornered, since there was only one way for him to get down, and that would be to pass Wild, provided he could live to get past him.

The daring boy proceeded up the ascent, regardless of the noise he made, though he was keeping a sharp watch.

He had gone about half way up when another shot rang out, and a bullet struck a rock six or seven feet to the right of him.

"Try it again, you cowardly fool!" muttered Young Wild West. "As if I would show myself so you could draw a bead on me!"

He got about ten feet further, and then he saw that he would give his hidden foe an open shot at him if he went on; so he came to a halt and crouched behind a boulder.

He had not taken this position more than ten seconds when he saw a form crawling along just to the right of the clump of rocks he had been making for.

Up went his trusty rifle, and the next moment its spiteful crack sounded.

Then Wild got up leisurely and walked up the ascent.

He soon reached the form he had shot at, and found it to be a man who had been hanging around Weston for the past week, getting drunk at the expense of others and making a sot of himself.

He was not dead, but soon would be, as his wound was a mortal one.

"Ah!" exclaimed Young Wild West; "you treacherous hound, you! This is what I get for giving you five dollars

the other day to set yourself right, is it? Now, I want you to tell me who hired you to shoot at me."

"Forgive me! For—forgive me, Young Wild West," gasped the dying man. "Dodger Dan and Silas Hodge give me two hundred dollars to kill you, an'—an' I—I tried to—to—"

That was all. The man gave a twitch of agony and rolled over dead.

Wild turned, and placing his hands to his mouth in the form of a trumpet, called out:

"Jim! Charlie! It is all over! Come up here! I want you!"

A couple of seconds later he heard them coming, and then he looked around for a convenient spot to bury the body.

There was a little hollow right handy by, and Wild nodded in a satisfied manner.

Jim and Charlie soon put in an appearance, and when they saw the body of the villain who had hired himself to kill their friend they looked pleased.

"I had to do it," said Wild. "He meant me, and it was his life or mine. He told me with his dying breath that Dodger Dan and Silas Hodge had paid him two hundred dollars to lay for me and kill me. He is the fellow who has been laying around town for a week or more, and appeared to be so grateful when I gave him five dollars the other day to give him a fresh start. He seemed sorry when I spoke to him about it, but it was too late then. He is the same as all scoundrels—they always want to be good when they find they have got to die. Let's bury him."

"Not with the two hundred dollars on him," spoke up Charlie.

"No; that's so. I'll take that, and I will hand it to the villains who hired him to kill me, with my compliments."

The three set to and placed the body in the hollow, and then with their knives they loosened the yielding soil and covered it from sight.

That was all there was to it, but many a better man had not received so good a burial.

When our three friends came back to the road those waiting for them were very anxious to know what had happened, especially the girls.

"I found the man who tried to shoot me, that's all," answered Wild.

They all knew what that meant, so no more questions were asked just then.

But a little later, as they rode along, Wild told them all about it.

"I can't understand how a man can be so bad as that," said Arietta. "It seems awful to have to kill such as they in

order to keep them from killing you; but I suppose it has to be done."

"Yes; and it always will be that way as long as there is no more law than there is now."

The rest of the ride to Spondulicks was without anything occurring out of the ordinary.

The city, as it was now called, was ablaze with bunting and excitement.

Never had there been such a crowd of people there before.

The branch railroad from the main line, which had lately reached there, was bringing in carload after carload of people to see the great Cowboy Carnival.

Spondulicks had never looked so much like a city before, and Wild could not help commenting on it.

"The railroad is fast making a place of this town," he said. "We want this railroad extended to Weston before long, and we are going to have it, too."

"If we do git it, we will soon make Spondulicks look sick," spoke up Jack Robedee. "Why, Weston is located in a spot that is a hundred per cent. better than this in every way. Wild, if you ever get the railroad there we'll have a city to be proud of, an' no mistake."

"If Wild says we will have the railroad, we will have it," Arietta remarked to the girls.

As the party rode into the principal street of the town they were forced to pick their way, the people were so thick.

There were hundreds of horsemen there, the most of them being cowboys and cavalymen, and they looked picturesque enough as the blue uniforms and shining brass buttons mingled with the gaudy trappings of some of the prairie riders.

Here and there a Mexican could be seen, his swarthy visage and yellow and red hunting suit showing up glaringly among the rest.

None of our friends were lacking as far as costumes went.

They had come over to the carnival to be seen, and they did not want it said that they were in any way shabby.

As they rode up the street to the hotel they proposed to dine at, Young Wild West met many old friends, and he got more than one cheer as he rode along at the side of his handsome sweetheart.

He was kept tipping his hat almost continually.

The hotel was at length reached, and when they had put their horses away they went in to the big parlor, or reception-room, it might be properly called.

From the windows the women folks could view the scene on the streets, and as there were few others in the room, they had pretty much their own way.

There was to be a big parade, which was scheduled to start

at eleven, but it was near that time now, and the grand marshal did not have his lines made up yet.

"It will be twelve o'clock before the parade starts," said Wild, "so we will leave the girls here for awhile and take a run around town a little. What do you say, Charlie?"

"Certainly," was the reply. "It wouldn't hardly be ther proper thing to take ther ladies around with us. Ther streets are full of drunken soldiers and cowboys, and ther first thing we would know there would be an insult given, an' then there would be trouble."

"Oh, you needn't bother about making such an excuse as that," spoke up Anna. "We don't want to go out with you, so go on, and behave yourself while you are gone. I don't want you to take a single drink of whiskey, either; for if you expect to win the prize at lasso throwing you want to be perfectly straight."

"I'll keep a watch on him," laughed Wild. "How about the rest of you? Are you going?"

"You an' Charlie go ahead; we'll stay here an' take care of ther women folks," Jack answered.

This seemed to suit Jim and Rick, so Wild and Charlie put on their hats and went out.

Two such fine-looking fellows as they were were bound to attract a whole lot of attention, and when they appeared on the street they were followed by the eyes of almost everything in petticoats, and several of the male members of the crowd cast admiring glances at them, too.

But there were plenty of men there who were ready to turn up their noses at Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie.

They were those who had been told who the two were, and were themselves going to compete for the prizes.

Wild had a whole lot of friends in Spondulicks, and they had not walked over a hundred yards when they came upon half a dozen of them in a bunch.

The result was that the leading spirit of the men proposed three cheers for him, and they were given with a will.

Three cowboys were galloping down the street at the moment the cheers were given, and they promptly reined in their bronchos and halted to see what it was all about.

They had been drinking and were in anything but a gentle mood.

"What in blazes is all this yellin' about?" demanded one, and then he discharged his revolver in the air to give a flourish to the question.

"We was jest givin' three cheers for Young Wild West," replied the citizen who had led the cheering, his eyes twinkling expectantly as he spoke. "It ain't too late for you fellers to jine in, if you want to."

"Who in blazes is Young Wild West?" and the cowboy let two shots go this time, one of them striking pretty close to the feet of Cheyenne Charlie.

"Jest let them pills of yours go some other way!" spoke up the scout. "Don't think that because you have got a little liquor in you that you are running this town."

The fellow laughed derisively, and then both he and his two companions began to let the bullets fly all around the feet of the scout.

"See here," cried Wild, drawing his revolver, "if you fellows are looking for trouble, you will get it right away. I am the fellow these gentlemen were cheering for. I am Young Wild West."

There was another burst of laughter, and the cowboys urged their horses forward for the purpose of making the party scatter.

As quick as lightning Wild seized the bridle rein of the horse of the fellow who had done the most talking and threw it back on its haunches.

The shock unseated the rider, and he fell in a heap to the ground.

The other two came to a halt from sheer amazement.

They had never seen such a trick performed before.

They looked at their companion getting up out of the dust, and then their eyes met a pair of revolvers in the hands of Cheyenne Charlie.

Then they remained right still in their saddles, although each of them held a revolver in his hand.

Meantime the fallen man got upon his feet pretty quickly for one who had been more or less dazed by such a sudden fall.

He was boiling with rage, too, and when he found that he had dropped his revolver he looked wildly around for it.

"You had better let that shooter lie right where it is," said Wild, in his easy-going style. "If you make a move to pick it up I will let a streak of daylight through you!"

That had the effect of bringing the man to his full senses.

He looked at the boy, then at his two companions, who were perfectly passive, and then at the laughing friends of Wild, who were enjoying the scene with a great relish.

Our hero still held the broncho by the bridle, and with his revolver he motioned to the cowboy to mount.

"Get into the saddle, and hurry up!" he said. "I'll hand your shooter to you. You are too old a man to cut up as you have, and you ought to know better."

The cowboy made no reply, but limped to the side of his horse and mounted.

Then Wild walked over and picked up the revolver that had been knocked from his hand and handed it to him.

"Now, make yourselves scarce, the whole three of you!" he cried. "If you don't hurry I'll make the bands of your hats sizzle. Off you go!"

Then, with a burst of laughter ringing in their ears, the three cowboys, who were now pretty well sobered up, rode off in the direction they had been riding when they foolishly came to a halt to meddle with some one else's business.

A large number of people had witnessed this scene from both sides of the street, and one of them was Fancy Phil, the Texan, the reckless rider Young Wild West was to compete with in the rough-and-ready riding match.

He was a powerfully built young man of probably twenty-eight, wore his hair down over his shoulders in true western style, and was quite handsome and dashing looking.

But he possessed a very mean principle, and that more than offset his good appearance.

"So that is Young Wild West, is it?" he muttered. "Well, I must say that he's got lots of nerve. So that's the feller who expects to win ther first prize! Well, he may make me hustle some. There is too much money bet on me for me to lose. I'll go and have a talk with Dodge and Hodge, I guess, an' find out all I kin about Young Wild West."

He turned and forced his way through the crowd and walked down the street until he came to the worst gambling resort in the lively little city.

He did not stop in the barroom, which was crowded to its utmost capacity, but went on through a narrow hall till he reached a door that bore a number 3 on it.

Fancy Phil gave a gentle knock on this, and the door was promptly opened.

The room was not a very large one, and in its center was a big round table covered with green baize.

About this table three men were seated, drinking wine, which was an expensive luxury in that part of the country in those days.

Two of the men were Dodger Dan and Silas Hodge, and the other was the proprietor of the place.

CHAPTER IV.

"YOUNG WILD WEST HAS GOT TO DIE!"

"Hello, Phil!" said Dodger Dan, as the reckless rider came in. "You look worried. What is the matter?"

"Nothing," he replied, taking the vacant chair the proprietor tendered him.

"There ain't anything wrong with you, is there?"

"No."

"And your horse is all right?"

"Yes."

"Well, what are you looking so blue about, then?"

"If I am looking blue I don't know it," and Fancy Phil broke into a laugh.

"Try a small drink of this wine; it won't hurt you a bit," said Silas Hodge.

"Well, I don't care if I do," and he reached out and took the glass.

"Here's luck!" exclaimed Dodger Dan, and then the four swallowed the wine.

"I saw Young Wild West a few minutes ago," said Fancy Phil, after a pause.

"You did?" cried Dodge, springing to his feet in surprise. Dan pulled him back in his chair.

"Keep still!" he whispered. "Don't give the thing away."

"So the crack shots and riders have come in from Weston, have they?" remarked the proprietor. "Young Wild West is quite a likely looking boy, isn't he?"

"Yes; he certainly is. I never seen a feller as young as he is with so much nerve. He must be as strong as a bull, too, for I seen him almost throw a broncho off his feet a little while ago an' send the rider sprawlin' on the ground."

"What was it—a row?"

"Yes; three drunken cowboys undertook to have some fun with the young fellow an' a fellow with a big mustache, who was with him."

"And they got the worst of it," added Hodge, as though it was a matter of course.

"Oh, they got very much the worst of it. Young Wild West simply made fools of 'em, an' then sent 'em off like three lambs. It struck me right then that he is goin' to give me a good tussel in this match to-day."

"You ain't getting squeamish about it, are you?" asked Dodger Dan, his face turning slightly pale. "You must win! Look at ther money we have got up on you!"

"Oh, I will win; don't be alarmed. I am sure of a whole lot of tricks I know he never dreamed of. I'll win the match, or die tryin'!"

"See here," said the proprietor of the gambling place, turning to the two villains. "It seems to me that this is going to be a desperate chance for our money. The best thing to do, I think, would be to let this Young Wild West get crippled a bit; or even if he should be wiped out altogether would be better. You can easily beat all the rest who have entered into the match, Phil, and if Young Wild West wasn't in it you would be a sure winner."

"We thought of that yesterday," said Hodge.

"But it didn't do any good, for all that," added Dan.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, well, I suppose we might as well tell you. We hired a man for two hundred dollars to pick Young Wild West off with a bullet while he was on his way from Weston here this morning."

"And it is quite likely that the fellow we hired got the bullet instead of Young Wild West," interrupted Hodge.

"You kin bet on that!" exclaimed Fancy Phil.

"You talk as though you would be afraid to tackle the young fellow yourself," observed the proprietor, as he poured out some more wine.

"No; I am not afraid to tackle him, or any one else."

Dodger Dan gave a nod of approval, and was just about to make a remark when there came a tap on the door.

The proprietor got up and opened it and found one of the employees of the house standing there.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Young Wild West is in ther barroom," was the reply. "I thought I'd come an' tell you about it."

"Good! Now, Phil, here is your chance! If you can get into an argument with Young Wild West and manage to lodge a bullet in one of his arms, or some other part of his body, you will be sure to win the match this afternoon."

"All right," was the rejoinder. "Come on out—I'll do my level best."

The four men got up from the table and walked through the hall into the barroom.

"I'll introduce you to him," whispered Dodger Dan. "Then you kin do the rest."

The reckless rider nodded.

Wild and Charlie had been invited into the place by a couple of their friends in town, and they now stood in the center of the barroom, being introduced to the crowd.

Dodger Dan very quickly pushed his way to the side of Wild.

"I want to introduce you to Fancy Phil, the man we have backed to win this afternoon," he said. "Fancy Phil, this is Young Wild West. Shake and be friends."

The two promptly clasped hands.

But it was more after the manner of a couple of prize-fighters who were just toeing the scratch.

Young Wild West saw at the first glance that Fancy Phil was not disposed to be at all friendly.

"I thought you was more of a man than you are," said Phil. "I didn't think I was to compete ag'in a boy for ther prize."

"Oh, I am not more than ten years younger than you are, I guess," was our hero's calm reply. "Probably you will find that I am man enough before the carnival is over."

"Pooh!" snapped the reckless rider, who was bent on pick-

ing a row. "I wouldn't consider it much of a victory to win over you. If I had known that you was only a boy I would not have gone in against you."

He had his hand right on the butt of his revolver when he said this, and seeing that there was trouble brewing, the crowd got back.

There were others beside Cheyenne Charlie in the room who were friends of Wild, and they were all ready for business.

As long as no one interfered it was all right, but the moment one of Fancy Phil's friends said a word, though they were largely in the majority, he would be shut up immediately.

"Fancy Phil," said Wild, looking the man squarely in the eyes, "you are trying to pick a muss with me! So let me tell you one thing, which is that the instant you draw your revolver you will be a dead man. I can shoot quicker than you, and I know it! Now, you treacherous hound! Draw if you dare! My hand is not on my shooter, and yours is!"

The face of the reckless rider turned three or four different colors in an instant, while a low murmur of amazement intermingled with applause went up from those in the room.

Fancy Phil realized that it was either "do or die" now, so he jerked his revolver from the holster.

But before he could fire it, Young Wild West's left fist shot out and knocked it from his hand.

Then the muzzle of a revolver was pressed against his heart, and these words rang in his ears:

"Fancy Phil, your life belongs to me! You are not what I call a coward, but you are the worst of all the sneaking scoundrels I have seen in this room, and that is saying a good deal. Your life belongs to me, but I am not going to take it just now. I want to show you that I know how to ride and shoot this afternoon in the carnival. I want to show you how easy it is for people like Dodger Dan and Silas Hodge to lose a lot of money. Now, then, you sneaking muss-maker, get out of here!"

Back from the farthest corner of the room a muffled report sounded, and a bullet grazed Wild's left ear, causing the blood to flow, and striking a cavalryman standing near the door between the eyes, killing him instantly.

But the echoes of the report had not died out when Cheyenne Charlie's revolver spoke, and the cowardly assassin threw up his hands and fell dead to the floor.

But never once did Young Wild West move his position or take his eyes from those of Fancy Phil.

"Thank you, Charlie," he said.

There was a shout of applause at this, which meant that the majority were on Wild's side.

Crestfallen, and without a word, Fancy Phil turned and left the room.

Dodger Dan and Silas Hodge were about to follow him when Wild called them back.

"When I referred to sneaking scoundrels being in this room, I meant you two," he said. "I have two hundred dollars you paid a coward to shoot me, and I want you to take it. The man is buried halfway between here and Weston, but he lived long enough to tell me who hired him to kill me. Take the money; it is yours! What! Don't want it? Take it, I say! It is the identical money you gave the man."

Wild's eyes flashed dangerously as he tendered the money to Dan, who happened to stand closest to it.

The villain must have noticed this fact, for he took the money and thrust it into his pocket, without even so much as denying the charge made against him.

Of course our hero had his revolver in his hand all the time this was taking place.

He was not running any chances.

The blood was trickling from his ear in a tiny stream, but he paid not the least attention to it.

The skin had been scraped off by the bullet and that was all.

It was only one of the many close shaves he had met with, and did not worry him in the least.

Dodger Dan and Hodge now walked slowly toward the door to the hall, and reaching it, they followed the proprietor to Room 3, where Fancy Phil awaited their coming.

When all were seated at the table they looked at each other without saying a word for the space of nearly a minute.

The owner of the place had brought a bottle of whiskey with him.

"Let's have a drink to steady our nerves," he said. "I reckon we all need it."

The fiery stuff was poured out and swallowed, and then he continued:

"Young Wild West has the greatest nerve and is the quickest man I ever saw! His match is not to be found in these parts, and if it can't be found here it can't nowhere."

"That may be true, what you say," retorted Fancy Phil. "But he has got to die, just the same!"

"You mean to finish him, then?" and Dodger Dan bent over eagerly.

"Yes; he will never win the match this afternoon, for I will shoot him before it is over! I will shoot him in the

back, and then I don't care if I am riddled with bullets the next minute. Young Wild West has got to die before this day is over!"

CHAPTER V.

THE THANKSGIVING DINNER.

Wild and Charlie did not remain long in the gambling place.

The friends who had asked them in there were very glad to see them come out alive.

They had no idea that there was going to be such an excitement, or they would not have taken them there.

"We simply wanted to show you the worst gambling hole in the city," said one.

"I am glad you showed me," answered Wild, "for I know now what kind of a man I have got to meet this afternoon. I will have to keep my eye on Fancy Phil the whole time, for I am sure that he would not hesitate to down me at the first chance he gets. I hope he does let me be, though, for I hear the sheriff will be present at the carnival, and if I should be compelled to drop the scoundrel there might be a little time."

"Oh, I know the sheriff," remarked one of the men. "He is a man who believes in fair play every time. He shows no partiality. You can bet that if Fancy Phil forced you to drop him the sheriff would be one of the first to pat you on the back."

"Well, I hope nothing of the kind happens. We did not come over here to spill any blood; we came to try and take some of the money from Spondulicks back to Weston with us."

"And I haven't the least doubt but that you'll do it."

It was now about twelve o'clock, and the parade had just got on the move.

Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie excused themselves and went straight back to the hotel.

Arietta and Anna showed how anxious they had been about their rather lengthy absence by running to meet them like two happy children.

"You act as though you thought we were never coming back," said Wild, with a laugh. "What have you all been doing with yourselves since we went out?"

"Oh, we have had a pretty good time between here and out on the porch," answered Arietta. "Jack has been kind enough to treat us to all the ice cream we could eat, which was not such an awful lot, as it is a little too cold to enjoy ice cream to-day. Then Jim has been trying to fill us up with ginger beer and peanuts."

"Well, I smell something that goes ahead of anything you have mentioned. It comes from the kitchen."

"That's turkey," grinned Lively Rick.

"Not ther wild kind, either, but like they have in ther East," added Jack.

"It makes no difference where the birds came from. I rather think I can do my share when we come to the table."

"What have you been doing with yourselves the past hour?" questioned Anna, turning to her husband.

"Oh, we met some friends and went around town a bit," was the reply.

"But what is the matter with Wild's car? I see it has been bleeding!"

"That's so," cried Arietta. "Now just tell us what has happened."

Wild told them as much as he thought they ought to know about it, and laughed it off.

The parade was now passing the hotel, so they all went out to see it.

Our friends had been urged to participate in it, but Wild thought it best not to do so.

He would get all the notoriety he wanted that afternoon.

As dinner was ready to serve at any time now, they waited till the parade had got past and then went into the dining-room.

It was certainly an excellent dinner that they sat down to.

"Every time I see turkey it reminds me of something that happened when I was a boy home in New York State," remarked Jack, as he sat down beside Martha.

"Tell us about it, Jack," exclaimed Jim, who was fond of hearing Robedee spin his yarns.

"Well," began Jack, "it was one Christmas when we was visitin' my Uncle Joe Christopher. When I say we I mean my father an' mother an' me. Of course we was to have turkey an' mince pie for dinner, an' I jest allowed that I was goin' to get a feed that would make me feel happy for a day or two.

"When twelve o'clock come ther big eighteen-pound turkey was taken out of ther oven to cool off a little before it was brought on ther table for Uncle Joe to carve, an' ther big bird smelled so nice that I got as close to it as I could. It sot on a table right by a winder, an' my aunt had raised ther winder so's a little cool air could strike the turkey afore she sot ther old man at work with ther earvin' knife an' fork.

"Uncle Joe had a big Newfoundland dog named Tige, or somethin' like that, an' he was just about as much interested in that turkey as I was. He sot outside on the kitchen stoop sniffin' at ther smell that was wafted to him by ther wind."

ther brown skin an' ther dressin' that was oozin' out of ther slit my aunt had sewed up after stuffin' it, as much as to say: 'I'd give a good deal to git my teeth into that turk. I dare you to throw it out here, Jack.'

"Ther turkey was restin' on its back, an' I wanted to see if it was brown on both sides, so I waited till no one was lookin', an' then took hold of one of ther legs stickin' up in the air an' turned him over. I don't exactly know jest how it was, but I must have turned the turkey too far over, for when I let go of the leg it rolled right out of ther winder, an' almost before it touched ther stoop Tige had it in his mouth an' was making a bee-line for ther barn.

"It must have burned him some, too, but he didn't let go. I yelled out: 'Uncle Joe, Tige's stole the turkey, an' he's goin' fir ther barn like a streak of greased lightnin'!'

"Then there was fun around there for a few minutes! The dog got under the barn, and he growled so that none of us dared to go under after him 'cept Uncle Joe, an' he was too big to git under. So we went without ther turkey for dinner, an' filled up on ther rest of ther stuff. Every time I see a turkey I always think of that time when Tige stole ther turkey, an' I was never suspected of havin' a hand in it."

While every one was laughing at Jack's story, Wild got up and went to all the windows in the dining-room, drawing his revolver as he started to do so.

"What's ther matter?" asked Jack, rising to his feet.

"Oh, nothing," was the answer. "I was just looking to see if that dog Tige was anywhere around. I am not going to get dished out of my turkey if I can help it, and if I set eyes on Tige sniffing around here he will be a dead dog, that's all."

Of course there was a big laugh at this sally, and it had hardly subsided when the waiters came in with the good things.

Then there was nothing said for the next minute or two.

Our friends had a table all to themselves, so there was plenty of room, and being hungry, they did full justice to the good things set before them.

'There was only one thing missing from the table, and that was wine.

As Young Wild West was the master of ceremonies, this was omitted.

But they had cider and good old-fashioned hot coffee instead.

They lingered nearly an hour at the table, chatting and laughing, and many were the times that Jack's story was commented on.

lot more to tell. His boyhood days had been full of such incidents, he said.

After dinner all hands took a stroll around to aid digestion, and not get sleepy, so they would not be in condition for the contests.

But they did not go on the principal streets. They chose that part of the town that was back of the hotel, where there were but few to see them.

In spite of this, however, it was but a few minutes before a small-sized crowd was at their heels.

Young Wild West appeared to be a great attraction, and it got so that he wished he was not so well known in the town.

But they stuck it out as long as they intended to, and got back to the hotel about half-past one.

A responsible man had been in charge of their horses since their arrival, and they now went to the stable and got them in readiness for what was before them.

Wild depended upon his horse almost as much as he did himself.

He had broken the sorrel to all the feats that he proposed to attempt that day.

And Cheyenne Charlie had trained his own horse.

In lasso throwing much depended on a man's mount.

While Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie were getting their horses ready a couple of strangers came around to the rear of the hotel and took up their positions where they could see what was going on.

None of our friends had ever seen them before, so they kept an eye upon them.

After a couple of minutes one of the men said:

"I am superintendent of the branch of the railroad that runs in here, and I am much interested in what is going on to-day. I made a wager of a thousand dollars an hour ago that Young Wild West would win the two-mile running race with that sorrel there. I take it that you are Young Wild West," and he turned to our hero.

"Yes, that is my name," was the reply.

"Well, I saw you when you rode into town this morning, and, though I am in the railroad business, I consider myself a fair judge of horseflesh. I must say that I never saw a finer beast in my life, and I have seen a good many."

It did not take Wild a minute to come to the conclusion that the man was perfectly sincere in what he said.

"Yes; that is a fine horse," he said. "I would not sell him for a good deal of money. He was a wild stallion the first time I was ever on his back. It was down at Fort Bridger, and a number of scouts, cowboys, and men from the fort were trying to break him to the saddle.

to, and failed, that the one who could stay on his back the longest could have him. After he had killed or wounded two or three I took a chance, and in a short time I had him under control. I even did some fancy riding with him a few minutes after he was declared my property, and he has proved to be faithful and true ever since."

The men seemed to be very much pleased and interested in what our hero said.

"I guess my money is safe enough," observed the one who had been doing the talking. "I bet with a fellow who said his name was Silas Hodge. He appeared to be dead set against you, Mr. West."

"I don't wonder at that, sir, since he was one of two scoundrels who paid a man two hundred dollars to shoot me from ambush."

"What!"

"That is right."

"And the man failed to kill you?"

"Yes; he shot twice and missed both times. Then I shot once and didn't miss. He told me with his dying breath who hired him to do the job."

"If Silas Hodge is that kind of a man we have been keeping rather poor company," and the railroad superintendent looked at his companion.

"Dodger Dan is the other man," said Wild.

"Well, those are just the two who have been friendly with us," replied the second man.

"If you take my advice, you will steer clear of them."

"Thank you for the advice."

"You may depend upon it that they have some scheme in view by the way they are acting toward you. But, gentlemen, I promise you that they will never do you any harm, if they just cross my path once more. I told them openly what they were less than two hours ago, and I even made them take the two hundred dollars they had given the man to lay me low."

"And they took it?"

"Yes; without a murmur, too."

"Well, I am more than surprised at those two men."

"So am I," chimed in the other.

Then they became quite confidential and told Wild that they were not exactly used to the ways of that part of the country, having come from New Orleans a short time before.

The superintendent of the railroad branch was named Coville, and his companion, who was a conductor, bore the name of Bryan.

Both men were of the go-ahead stamp and were honorable and courageous, and, incidentally, knew how to shoot.

Dodge and Hodge had made their acquaintance a few days

before, and had been doing their level best to gain favor with them.

Both admitted that on the advice of the villainous pair they had placed quite a little money on Fancy Phil to win the rough-and-ready riding match.

"Well," said Wild, "you can do as you like about it, gentlemen; but since I have got in Spondulicks I have come to the conclusion that I am a sure winner in that event. This Fancy Phil, Dodge and Hodge are betting their money on, picked a quarrel with me this morning, and they tried to drop me. I let him live, gentlemen, just to prove to him that I knew more about rough riding than he did. I had an idea that I was going to win when I first entered into the thing, but now I feel positive of it."

"That is enough, Mr. West. We will go and hedge as soon as possible."

"Do as you like, gentlemen. I am not going to advise you, but you can see that I am almost positive, if not quite so, that I am going to win. The two men you have spoken of have a big pile bet against me, and they will not stop at anything to keep me from winning. But I will fool them all, gentlemen; I will fool them all."

"If you win it will be against great odds," said the conductor; "but, anyhow, my money goes with you."

Thanking Wild politely, the two men walked off.

"Those fellows seem to be nice enough," observed our hero to Jim. "I was pretty sure that they were from the south when they began to talk. I'll bet that Dodger Dan and his pal are working some scheme to rob them."

"That is a pretty sure thing. But there are Et and Anna waiting for their horses. Come, Jack! we will take them over to them."

The next minute the girls had mounted, and then all hands sprang into the saddle and started for the grounds where the carnival was to be held, which were about half a mile away.

CHAPTER VI.

WILD WINS THE TWO-MILE RACE.

The grounds selected by the committee for the Cowboy Carnival were almost perfectly level and were acres in extent.

A better spot could not have been found in all that mountainous region.

The band at the side of the judges' stand was playing its loudest when Young Wild West's party rode up and

took their places in the roped-in square set aside for the contestants.

The first event scheduled to take place was the two-mile race.

There proved to be twenty-eight contestants in this, and it took some little time to get them ready.

Some of the best horses the country had ever produced were there, and some of the best men, too, let it be said, were there to ride them.

It was fully half an hour before everything was in readiness, and when they lined up for the start the greatest enthusiasm prevailed in the greatest crowd of people Spauldicks had ever known.

Young Wild West was watching everything that was taking place.

Fancy Phil was not in the race, but he noticed that he was doing considerable whispering to one of the men who was.

This was a wiry, half-breed Mexican, or greaser, as they are commonly called, and our hero made up his mind that he was the one he must look out for.

The greaser's mount was a clean-limbed Texan horse of a dapple gray color and looked to be very speedy.

"There is some sort of a plot to beat me in this race," thought Wild. "The chances are that two or three will pocket me near the finish and give that greaser a chance to come in ahead. That is, of course, if I give them a chance to do anything like that."

He knew just what Spitfire could do, still he was a trifle nervous as he waited for the crack of the pistol that was to start them.

Pretty soon it came.

Young Wild West was one of the last to get away, but he did not mean to stay in that position any longer than he could help.

The yelling was really deafening, and some of the contestants, who were under the influence of liquor, joined in with the crowd and yelled themselves hoarse.

It seemed that at least half of that vast crowd were shouting for Young Wild West, but he did not hear it.

He was watching his chance to shoot ahead and get the lead.

He knew that if he once did get ahead he would surely hold that place to the finish.

The course was a mile out around a stake and back.

All along the people were scattered, some standing and some on horseback.

When the racers had covered about a quarter of a mile the chance Wild was looking for came.

"Now, Spitfire, now!" he cried to his horse, and away shot the faithful steed like a ball from a cannon.

Like the wind itself, Young Wild West shot ahead and took the lead.

A couple of the riders did their best to hamper him, but he eluded them with great skill and soon left them far in the rear.

But the greaser and the dapple gray were hot after him.

"Five to one that Young Wild West wins!" cried Superintendent Coville, holding a bunch of greenbacks in his hand above his head.

"I am sorry to bet against a friend, but I have got to take a thousand dollars' worth of that," called out Dodger Dan, who happened to be standing near.

"You are welcome to it," and the railroad man counted out the money in a jiffy.

One of the judges took the stakes, and then the sheriff of the county stepped up and offered Dan the same bet, which was also taken.

Dan did not know it was the sheriff he was betting with, or perhaps he would have hesitated about taking it.

"There's going to be fair play here," said the sheriff in a loud tone, as he started his horse toward the turning stake. "I don't want to see any monkeyin', like there was when Young Wild West passed ther bunch an 'got ahead. If there is, some one will hear my ammunition go to waste!"

He galloped off, not half the people knowing who he was.

But those who did know him were well aware that he meant just what he said.

But let us follow Wild in his great race.

When he reached the turning stake, the greaser was not over a dozen yards behind him, he having gained a drifle.

The rest were in a bunch, and over a hundred yards behind.

Our hero knew it would be wise for him to steer clear of the bunch, so, much to the surprise of the spectators near the stake, he shot off in a semi-circle to the right.

This gave the greaser, who took the straight course back a chance to even up with him in short order.

But that made no difference to Young Wild West.

As soon as he passed the bunch, he headed in a straight line for the finish line opposite the judges' stand.

Then he urged Spitfire forward at a faster gait than had yet traveled in the race, and victory was plainly in sight.

When there was a quarter of a mile yet to go Wild was easily a hundred yards in the lead.

It was a thousand to one that he would win.

And win he did, for a few seconds later the mag-

sorrel shot over the finish line a hundred and fifty yards ahead.

It would be difficult to describe the scene when that took place.

The rough-and-ready westerners just made the welkin ring.

They howled themselves hoarse, shot off rifles and revolvers, and some of them even tried to stand on their heads.

Of course there were a great many who did not give vent to their feelings in this way.

They were those who had lost their money on the race.

And there were a great many of them, too, but chiefly among them were Dodger Dan, Silas Hodge, and the other regular frequenters of the gambling house the two villains made their headquarters at.

Dodge and Hodge were very much down in the mouth.

Their losses on that race were heavy, and they felt that their only hope was that Fancy Phil would win the event he had entered.

They sought out the Texan and asked him how it was that Young Wild West had managed to get ahead after being left in the rear at the start.

"You saw how he done it, didn't you?" he answered, with something like a growl.

"Well, you said you had it all fixed so he would be pocketed until the Mexican fellow got such a lead that it would be impossible for him to lose."

"So I did have it all fixed, but Young Wild West was too sharp for the lunkheads. He got away from them too easy for anything; and look how he did after he made the turn!

He swerved off and kept clear of the bunch, losing ground by it. I tell you, that horse of his is a wonder, and he is a wonder himself. But he has got to die before he leaves these grounds, though!"

"Well, let it be before he wins the other contest, then," spoke up Hodge.

Fancy Phil walked away without making a reply.

In spite of his assertion that Young Wild West would die before he left the grounds, he was doing more worrying than he had ever done in his life before.

Jim Dart and Jack Robedee took charge of Wild's horse when he dismounted after the race and proceeded to give him a good rubbing down.

They thought almost as much of Spitfire as our hero did himself, and they were bound that he should be in tip-top condition when he went into the next contest.

"Oh, Wild! you did splendid!" cried Arietta, catching her and holding her by both hands when he came up to her. "I was

Dodge

sure you would win, but still I was afraid something would happen to you."

"The odds were against me, Et, I know, but I fooled them. I was sure that wiry little greaser was the man who had been picked to beat me, and I just showed him a trick that he had never learned before. I kept out of the pocket his confederates had prepared for me, all right, and when I once got the lead I just laughed in my sleeve at the poor fools who had laid their plans to beat me. I suppose there will be some trouble before this carnival is over, and I am keeping a good lookout. In the meantime, Et, you just keep an eye around, and if you see any one acting as though they mean me, just let them have a bullet."

"I will, Wild. I would shoot a hundred scoundrels like the men who are trying to kill you before I would see you harmed."

CHAPTER VII.

A DEAD HEAT.

The next was a riding race between ladies, and almost as much interest was manifested in it as had been in the men's contest.

Both Arietta and Anna were a trifle nervous, but Wild and Charlie told them to take it cool.

This encouraged them a whole lot, and when they rode up in line with the seven other contestants, they felt just a little confident.

All the contestants were typical women of the West.

The majority of them had learned to shoot and ride when they were little children.

"That is about as pretty a sight as I have seen in many a day," remarked Coville, the railroad man.

"Yes," answered his companion. "They are most all young girls, too, and there isn't a bad-looking one among them."

"I understand that that pretty girl over there on the iron gray is Young Wild West's sweetheart. The one next to her is the wife of Cheyenne Charlie, the man who shot the coward who grazed Young Wild West's ear with a bullet in the gambling house row."

"Yes; I know they are. I would pick either of them to win."

"Well, so would I; just because they belong to the crowd of Young Wild West, if for no other reason."

The ladies were resplendent in their riding costumes, and most of them had feathers in their hats.

Arietta had a blue feather in hers, and Anna a red one.

For a wonder they were all ready when the pistol went off to start them.

Away they went for the turning stake, making as pretty a sight as one wanted to see.

Several men rode along close to the course to give encouragement to the ones they wanted to win, and among these were Jim and Jack.

Wild and Charlie did not go, as they did not want it said that they had anything to do with the race.

The race grew very exciting as the turning stake was reached.

Anna was the first to make the turn, and close after her was a girl dressed in green velvet and riding a bay horse.

Arietta was only a length behind her, and when the straight run for the finish began all her nervousness left her and she settled right down to win the race.

With eyes bright as stars and cheeks glowing with excitement, she leaned over and urged her horse forward.

And the animal responded to her call, too, for he shot out at a terrific speed and rapidly overtook the two ahead of him.

In ten seconds the green rider had been passed and Anna was only leading by a length.

"I am going to beat you if you don't look out, Anna!" called out Arietta.

"Come on, then," was the answer to the challenge.

The two had now entered into the full spirit of the thing, and it appeared as though they had forgotten that there was any one else in the race but themselves.

On came the two leaders, leaving the rest farther behind every second.

Arietta was still second, and it struck her very forcibly that unless she could make an extraordinary spurt pretty soon she would be in that place at the finish.

It was a very good horse that Cheyenne Charlie's wife was riding.

When the finish line was but a hundred yards away, and she still held the lead by a length, almost every one thought she was the winner.

But just then Et gave the iron gray a tap with the whip and commanded him to go faster.

The result was marvelous, for she gained at every leap of the horse, and when the two crossed the line they were neck and neck.

"Hurrah! Hurrah!" cried the excited crowd, some of them thinking Arietta had won, and others being positive that Anna had crossed the line first.

But the judges were impartial, and they declared the race to be a dead heat.

The girl in green came in third about a dozen lengths behind.

Everybody expected to see Arietta and Anna ride again to see who took the first prize, but they did not do so.

Both Wild and Charlie thought they had better not, and that was sufficient to settle the matter.

"I will take the second prize, and Anna the first," said Et. "That is the only way I will have it."

"No; you should take the first," Anna insisted. "I am sure if the finish line had been a dozen feet further you would have won, anyhow."

"But it wasn't you see," was the answer. "Now, Anna, you ought to know that I wouldn't urge you to take first prize if I didn't want you to have it from the bottom of my heart. Take it, will you?"

"Yes; I will take it, then; but I hardly feel that I am entitled to it."

"You are entitled to half of it, and I am making you a present of the other half. There is not so much difference between the prizes, after all. They are both diamond pins, and one is just the least bit larger than the other."

The prizes were given to them right away, and their friends crowded around to see them.

Those who had journeyed over from Weston to see the carnival were in the highest pitch of enthusiasm.

Dove-Eye Dave and Brown, the proprietor of the Gazoo, had just come over in time to see the finish of the dead heat between Arietta and Anna.

They were going around shaking hands with everybody they knew, and offering to bet that Weston would take more first prizes from the tournament than all the rest of the towns together.

As there were only ten first prizes to be given, our friends would have to win six of them to do this.

But Brown had figured the thing down pretty well, and he had the greatest of confidence in his own townspeople.

At first there were no takers, but when the sporting men realized that Weston must take six out of the ten to let the challengers win they concluded that it was a good bet, and in less than ten minutes the two had all their money covered.

Young Wild West did not try to stop them.

He felt sure that he was going to win in the two events he was yet to take part in, and Charlie was almost certain of winning his event, while it was acknowledged that there were no real fast runners there to bother Jack in winning the footrace.

That left it to either Arietta or Anna to win the first prize in the ladies' shooting match.

"We stand a good show," said Wild, as Dove-Eye Dave and Brown came up and shook hands with him. "I was never more confident in my life. There are some here who are doing their level best to keep me from winning the rough-and-ready contest, as they call it, but I am keeping an eye on them."

"I suppose Dodger Dan and Silas Hodge are in that crowd?" Brown said.

"Yes; they are the ringleaders in it. They hired a man to shoot me on the way over from Weston, but he missed, and so Jim and Charlie helped to bury him."

"I'll watch the cusses," said Dove-Eye. "Jest pint 'em out to me."

"There they are over there. That cowboy they are talking to is the fellow they have bet their money on to beat me. He means me, I think—that is, I think he means to drop me with a bullet before this thing is over, if he gets the chance."

"So that's Fancy Phil, ther great rider from Texas, is it?" observed Brown. "Well, you kin jest bet we will keep an eye on him. Ah! they are getting ready for the rifle shootin'."

Jim Dart was in this, and the judges were examining the rifles of those who had entered to see that the caliber was within the limits.

There were thirty-nine entries—more in this contest than in any of the others.

And every man who went in was a good shot.

In addition to the three prizes to be given there would be quite a sum of money to the winner.

Jim kept as cool as an iceberg, and sat down to wait for his turn.

He was the third from the last, and that suited him all the better.

The distance was a thousand yards for the first shots, five hundred for the second and a hundred yards for the third.

The winners in each of these would then shoot off for the prizes.

The first man to shoot did not hit the target at all, and the second came within six inches of the big bull's-eye.

The third man came within two inches of it, and he held the lead until the twenty-fifth man came up.

He was a tall Nebraskan, and was noted for his great shooting, having held off a band of sixteen hostile Sioux while crouching behind the dead body of his horse and shooting them all at long range except one.

This was certainly a great record, and the many friends

the man had in the crowd gave him a cheer as he stepped up.

He took careful aim, and when he pulled the trigger a shout went up from those standing near the target.

"Edge of ther bull's-eye!" cried the man in attendance. "Close enough to drop an Injun."

The bull's-eye itself was black, but there was a white spot in the center the size of the butt of a hen's egg, and the person who could hit that would certainly be a wonder.

The next man stepped up when the cheering had subsided and failed to score at all.

It was now Jim Dart's turn, and when he toed the mark the men from Weston let themselves be heard.

"Ten to one that he don't beat it!" called out Dodger Dan as soon as he could make himself heard.

"I will take all you have got on that," promptly answered Brown.

Dan thought that he had a sure bet, so he put up nearly every dollar he could scrape together.

Jim waited to give his friends a chance to bet all the money they wanted at the odds that were being offered.

He was confident that he could do as good as the Nebraskan had, if not better.

And he meant to do better.

Wild had a smile on his face as he walked about, but said nothing.

He had faith in Jim, because he knew what he could do.

"Go ahead and shoot," called out one of the judges. "We are wasting time. We won't get through before dark if we don't get a little more of a move on."

Jim raised his rifle to his shoulder, and taking careful aim, pulled the trigger.

As the report rang out the man attending the target threw his hat in the air.

"A dead center!" came the announcement.

A howl of mingled delight and disappointment went up from the crowd.

The friends of the Nebraskan would not believe it, so they ran to the target to see for themselves.

But there it was! The white dot in the center of the bull's-eye had been pierced by Jim's bullet.

The last three men to shoot made bad misses, and that left Jim Dart the winner of the first heat.

And Dodger Dan nearly had a fit.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROUGH RIDING MATCH.

"It looks to me as though luck was against us," said Hodge with a sigh. "Those Weston people seem to be away

ahead of all the rest. Dan, if Fancy Phil loses we will be broke."

"That's right; but he ain't going to lose. It ain't possible that we could lose every bet we make," was the reply.

"Well, it looks that way."

"You ain't beginning to squeal, are you?"

"No."

"Well, shut up, then!"

"Look here, Dodger Dan, I don't like to be told to shut up. Now, I'll just tell you what I'll do. How much money have you got left?"

"Not more than fifty or sixty dollars, and if I lose that I've got my watch and these diamond studs to fall back on."

"Well, I'll bet you my watch and fifty dollars against yours and the same amount that Young Wild West wins the match."

"Are you getting crazy, Hodge?"

"No; I am just beginning to get a little sane, I think. We are playing against the stiffest combination we ever met, and I'll make this bet with you, so you can have your diamond studs left to keep you till you strike another good thing. Do you dare to bet me?"

"Yes; confound you! I'll take the bet; but I want to tell you right here that if I lose your friendship ceases."

"All right; let it cease. I'll hold you to your word on the bet," and Hodge walked off.

The villain wanted to see Wild beaten in the worst way, but he had a sort of presentiment that such would not be the case, and just because his partner had been so confident all along that they were going to win the big pile of money they had put up, he became angered at himself and Dan, too.

He thought he would make the bet, and if Wild did win he would have something to throw up to Dodge every time they had a little tiff.

The next thing on the programme was the lariat swinging contest.

There had been little money bet on this, and it was not until the twenty horsemen who had paid the entrance fee lined up that any wagers of any amount were made.

Then Dove-Eye Dave and Brown went around the crowd and offered to back Cheyenne Charlie.

As they were picking a winner against the field, they had no difficulty in laying their money.

The contest was a novel one.

Twenty wild steers were to be turned out, and the man who succeeded in catching most of them in twenty minutes was to be declared the winner.

It had been two or three years since Cheyenne Charlie had done any real work of this sort, but he felt equal to the occasion, however.

He had practiced a whole lot at catching running horses the past week, and he knew that a steer would be easier to catch than a horse.

Pretty soon the steers were turned loose, and then the shot rang out for them to go.

And go they did.

The band played a lively tune while the contest was going on, and the crowd cheered their favorites.

Cheyenne Charlie made a miss of the first swing he made, but that did not bother him a great deal.

The next time he caught a big fellow around one of the fore legs and threw him.

He dismounted and released the noose and was back in the saddle in twenty seconds.

That was one.

In another minute he had landed another and was after the third.

Some of the cowboys were doing fully as well as he, and it behooved him to hustle.

Charlie never missed after that, and he rapidly forged ahead of his competitors.

When the twenty minutes were up he had lassoed eighteen steers.

The nearest man to him had thirteen to his credit, and there were four tied for third place with eleven.

If ever there were two jubilant men they were Dove-Eye Dave and Brown.

Things were going just their way, and they felt confident that they would go back to Weston several thousand dollars richer.

Cheyenne Charlie was given a great ovation when he rode back to the judges' stand and was declared a winner.

He took off his sombrero and bowed right and left to his cheering friends.

The ladies' shooting match came next.

There were only five entries, and two of them were from Weston.

Weston men found it difficult to get any bets.

The betting men were afraid of the people from that town.

Arietta's eyes sparkled.

She did not want to make a tie of this, not even with her close friend, Anna.

She wanted to win, because she knew how proud Wild would feel if she did.

The contestants were to fire three shots each at a target a hundred yards distant.

Arietta was the first one to shoot, and much to the satisfaction of her friends, she scored three bull's-eyes.

The girl to follow hit it twice out of three times, and then came Anna's turn.

She hit the bull's-eye twice, too, and that made her tied for second place, so far.

The other two ladies retired with one bull's-eye apiece to their credit.

That left Arietta a winner.

"I am proud of you, little one," said Wild, as she came up to him smiling as happy as a child.

"I am glad I won, Wild," was all she said.

Anna was compelled to shoot off the tie with the other lady, and the result was that she won with two bull's-eyes against her opponent's one.

"It couldn't suit me any better," said Charlie's wife.

And her husband was satisfied, too.

The afternoon was now fast waning, and the judges hurried matters a bit.

The rough-and-ready riding was to be the last on the programme, and there were two events to take place before that.

The footrace and then the shooting from horseback.

There were about a dozen entries in the footrace, and as the distance was short, it was soon over with, Jack being a winner by almost ten yards.

"Everything is going over to Weston, I tell yer!" roared Dove-Eye Dave, who had been paying frequent visits to the stand where drinks were being sold. "If you want to make money bet on Weston every time."

This cry was taken up by a lot of miners who were in about the same condition the old man was, and they made a regular song of it.

Through some neglect on the part of the committee there had been no prize put up for the shooting from horseback match, so as it was getting late, the men who had entered it—all but three, including our hero—agreed to take their money back and call it off.

That made only one event left.

This was the one Dodge and Hodge had wagered so much money on, which was really the event of the day.

The Texan, who had promised that Young Wild West would never leave the grounds alive, was getting more nervous every minute.

He was not prepared to die just yet and he knew it; but he hated Young Wild West for what he had done to him in

It was while the ladies' shooting match was going on that Dodger Dan noticed how nervous Fancy Phil was becoming, and he concluded that the best thing he could do with him was to ply some whiskey into him.

And Phil was willing to drink all he could get, though if he had been simply bent on winning the event he would not have touched a drop.

He knew he was altogether too nervous to make a good showing, and therefore his nerves must be steadied.

When Dan had got three big drinks in him he led him aside.

"How are you going to manage it?" he asked. "You must try and drop him so it will appear as an accident."

"How am I going to do that?" was the answer. "If you can tell me how, I'll feel a whole lot easier, an' I'll win sure."

"I will tell you how it can be done. I will get three or four men to start a make-believe row. They will do it right as close to where you and Young Wild West are, and they will let the bullets fly in the air over each other's heads. I will join in the game with them, and while our guns are cracking away, you can fire the shot that will settle Young Wild West. It will be easy enough to do, and no one will know but the shot came from one of the men in the row, and hit him accidentally."

"That's so," exclaimed the Texan, brightening up. "Well, if you kin fix it that way I may have a chance to kill Young Wild West and live myself after it is done."

"When the make-believe flight begins you get ready, and when a good chance comes let go at him. Be sure that you aim straight, though, as it wouldn't do to make a miss."

"I'll aim straight enough, don't worry about that."

Dodger Dan now felt that it was a sure thing that he would win the money he had put up on the match.

If he did win he would be a few thousand dollars ahead, in spite of all he had lost on the other events.

He now sought out the proprietor of the gambling house and asked him to find three or four of the kind of men he wanted.

In a place like Spondulicks such men were to be found readily.

In a few minutes four of them had been secured to do just what was required, according to Dodger Dan's way of thinking, and all they had to do was to wait till he gave the signal.

Meanwhile Young Wild West was on the watch.

When it came time for the last event to take place he knew pretty well what was up.

he was not so good in carrying out the schemes after he had conceived them.

He did not go at it as secretly as he should.

Wild had seen him take Fancy Phil to the stand and get him to drink whiskey, and he had noticed how earnestly the two were talking after that.

When he saw the Texan walk away nodding his head in a satisfied manner he felt sure that a scheme to kill him had been put up between the two.

"I rather think that Dodger Dan and Fancy Phil will never live to get away from this field," he muttered to himself. "I suppose I will have to drop them pretty soon, but I shan't do it until I am very sure they mean me."

There were seven rough riders who had entered in the match, and when they had mounted and rode up before the chairman of the committee Young Wild West leaped into the saddle and took his place in the line.

That made eight of them all told.

Wild was at one end of the line and Fancy Phil at the other.

"Boys," said the chairman, "we have decided to have this match by letting a sort of leader go ahead and do what he knows how to do, or as much as he sees fit to do on the start, and then let the rest of you follow one at a time.

"If you all do as well as he has, he will start in again and go the rounds till one or more fail, and then those who do fail will have the privilege of selecting a leader among them, who will start doing the stunts, and keep on doing them until some one equals him, when he must drop out of the game. Then a new leader will be appointed, and it will go on the same until the champion is left on the field. Do all understand it, now?"

Some of them could hardly understand it, so it was thoroughly explained to them.

When they finally did understand it they all voted that the thing could not be done any more squarely.

Lots were then drawn to see who would take the lead on the start.

No one wanted that task, it seemed, but they were willing to draw for it.

It fell to a Spondulicks man, whom the townspeople called Twister.

"Go in, Ben, and show 'em something on the start!" they cried.

Ben led off by riding around the grounds in a circle as fast as his horse could go, dropping his hat the first time he went around and picking it up at the second.

The feat had been performed very neatly, but there was

nothing difficult about it, and they all did the same thing, one after the other.

Then Ben gave them something a little harder.

He dropped his hat and handkerchief this time at a distance of about twelve feet apart the first time he went around, and the second he picked them up with the greatest of ease.

His seven followers did the same, and the crowd waited to see what Ben would do next.

The next thing he first procured four more handkerchiefs and rode out in a straight line, dropping them about thirty feet apart.

When he was ready he uttered a yell and galloped down the line, making his horse go in a zigzag fashion, and picking a handkerchief alternately from the ground on the right and left side of his steed.

A rousing cheer was given the Spondulicks man when he came galloping in.

In truth, it was a very clever performance.

The first man to try it failed, as did the second.

They each received a failure mark.

This sort of thing was easy for Young Wild West to do, and he picked up the handkerchiefs with a grace and ease that completely won the crowd.

The rest managed to do the trick, too, but it was by an awful narrow margin for a couple of them.

The rule laid down was that no man should have more than one trial at one particular stunt, as the chairman of the committee chose to call the feats.

It now fell to the two men who had missed to select a man to do the stunts, and as they had to select him from themselves, they tossed up a coin to settle it.

It fell upon the one who bore the nickname of Twister, and he rode off with the speed of the wind, and after covering a hundred yards of so he loosened his feet from the stirrups and with an agile movement swung himself around and rode facing his horse's tail.

Coming back over the same ground, he did this thing three times in rapid succession, and he received much applause for the quick and easy manner in which he did it.

The thing looked very easy, but none of the rest had ever tried to do it so quickly as all that, and the result was that they all failed but three.

And Young Wild West and Fancy Phil were two of the three.

Those who had failed were of course out now for good, because they had been beaten by a man who had failed on the start.

That left it to Twister to still be leader.

If Wild and Fancy Phil succeeded in doing what he did this time he would be out for good.

Twister was quite a favorite with the crowd, and he was greatly encouraged at the cheering he got.

He decided to do something great this time.

He started off at full speed and then suddenly slipped his toes under the saddle girths and stood straight up.

There was a loud yell of approval at this, but when he took the bridle rein in his teeth and came back waving his hands in the air the applause was deafening.

Wild simply looked over at Cheyenne Charlie when he saw this.

That was a very easy thing for him to do.

And so had the other stunts been.

According to his idea, there had not been anything done that was real difficult.

Fancy Phil had to go next, and he managed to do the feat well enough to satisfy the judges that he was entitled to stay in.

Wild was now watching the Texan as a cat watches a mouse, for he saw Dodger Dan and four tough-looking men working their way in that direction.

He had his revolver ready for instant use, and meant to use it if it became necessary.

Just as he was about to ride off to do the feat that was required of him, several pistol shots were fired close behind him.

Instead of looking in that direction, he shot his gaze to Fancy Phil, and was just in time to see him in the act of drawing his revolver.

CHAPTER IX.

YOUNG WILD WEST WINS.

Wild knew what that revolver was being drawn for.

Fancy Phil again had the chance to see how quick the boy was.

He was just going to raise his weapon to fire the cowardly shot when——

"Drop that, Fancy Phil!"

The words rang out clear and distinct, and a thousand eyes turned as Young Wild West spoke them.

With a muttered oath of rage and disappointment the Texan let the revolver fall to the ground.

As this happened Dodger Dan rushed to the scene, white with rage at being balked in his game.

"You get out of the way!" sternly commanded Wild.

"Drop that shooter you have in your hand, or I'll knock one of those diamonds out of your shirt front!"

"Confound you!" screamed the man, who was now so enraged that he hardly knew what he was doing. "Take that, Young Wild West!"

His finger was about to pull the trigger that would send a bullet crashing into Wild's breast, but he did not live to do it.

Wild's revolver cracked in the nick of time, and Dodger Dan fell without so much as a groan escaping his lips.

The four men who had engaged in the make-believe fight made themselves scarce at a command from Cheyenne Charlie.

Fancy Phil acted as though he would very much like to follow suit, but Wild told him to stand right where he was.

Then the brave young prince of the saddle raised himself in his stirrups and waved his hand for silence.

He got it much sooner than he expected.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, as soon as he could make himself heard, "I just shot a man, and I think it would be well to explain why I was compelled to do it. I could have shot him in the arm and prevented his shooting me, but I thought it was about time that he left this earth, and I will tell you why.

"This is the third time he has put up a scheme to take my life, and all because he had a big pile of money bet against me and did not want me to win this match. He backed the man who stands before me like a whipped cur, and when Fancy Phil began to think that he did not stand much of a show with me in this competition, he became very bitter against me, too, and wanted my life.

"He tried his hand over in a certain gambling house in your town here, but I got the drop on him and spared his life. And now, in return for sparing his life this morning, he was going to shoot me only a minute ago.

"Once more I got the drop on him, and have it now. If I did what I ought to do I would shoot him down as he stands there. But I am not going to do that, ladies and gentlemen. I am going to make him finish this contest, and then whether he wins it or loses, I am going to give him just three minutes to get out of my sight. I am now ready to resume."

For the space of probably ten seconds a silence followed Wild's words.

Then a ringing cheer went up.

When it had subsided the chairman of the committee and the judges of the events came over to where Wild was, and Jim, Charlie, Jack and Lively Rick quickly followed.

"Go on, Wild," said Jim. "Show them how you can do the standing up trick. Then it will be Fancy Phil's chance to give you something to do. You have not won the match yet."

"No; but he will win it," cried the voice of Dove-Eye Dave. "I'll bet five hundred dollars to a silver quarter on that."

The old man meant it, too, for he walked around with the money in his hands, begging some one to bet with him.

But the sympathy of the crowd was all with Young Wild West just then, and it would have been almost as much as a man's life was worth to bet against him.

As soon as order could be restored, Wild rode off to do the stunt he had not yet done, and he did it so much better than the man who was called Twister that the crowd nearly went wild over him.

That dropped the man from the eligible list, and it now lay between our hero and the Texan.

Fancy Phil said that if Young Wild West would do something, he would try to duplicate it, so Wild concluded to accommodate him.

"Show us what you can do, now."

"We know you can win with hands down."

"Give us something good."

These and many other similar cries rang out as the boy mounted again and got ready.

He had Spitfire trained to perfection, and he was not afraid to do almost anything with him.

Wild began by riding around in a circle, and when he rode around half a dozen times he suddenly took both feet from the stirrups and swung himself across the saddle on his stomach.

Then he began working his way toward the belly of the galloping horse, using the stirrup on that side to hold his weight by the left hand.

Slowly but surely he worked his way around, and at length he was able to reach under and catch the other stirrup with his right hand.

The crowd waited with bated breath.

Never before had they seen such a feat attempted.

It seemed impossible for the boy to do what they saw he was trying to do.

He was going directly under the belly of the galloping horse, and then come up to the saddle on the other side.

And that was just what Wild was going to do.

The sorrel kept on at a steady gait around the big circle.

The intelligent animal knew just what was required of him now.

When our hero had got a good hold upon the stirrup with

his right hand he slowly brought his left toe down till it struck the other stirrup.

When the toe was once in it, he gave a sudden swing, and was around on the other side before the spectators were hardly aware of it.

And he had not touched the ground, either.

But the thing to do now was to draw himself up into the saddle.

That was the easiest part of the whole thing, however, and it was with a sigh of relief a few seconds later that the crowd saw him reach the saddle once more.

Of all the applause that had been given that day the greatest came now.

It was the crowning act of all, and the spectators craned their necks to see what Fancy Phil would do.

"I'll try to do that," he said. "I might succeed, and I might not. Anyhow, there is a whole lot of money bet on me, and I want to do the best I can to win it for those who made the wagers. Here goes!"

He flung himself into the saddle, and just as he forced his horse forward he turned and showed a revolver in his hand.

He had carried it in his hip pocket and it had not been observed before.

Before any one knew what was up, he fired a shot at Young Wild West, which missed him and struck the chairman of the committee, who was looking over his shoulder at the time.

A dozen rifles and revolvers were instantly raised, but the word "Don't!" came from the lips of Wild in ringing tones.

Then he was in the saddle and off like a meteor after the cowardly villain.

No one offered to fire a shot after that word, "Don't!" rang out, and now the greatest excitement of the day began.

The crowd wanted to see what would be the result of the chase.

They fell over one another in their efforts to get a view of the two horsemen.

CHAPTER X.

THE END OF FANCY PHIL.

The vast crowd was so busy watching the exciting chase that they did not notice two of the men who had been in the make-believe row mount their horses and ride off to the left.

They were close friends of Dodger Dan, and they felt like avenging his death.

Fancy Phil had succeeded in getting a good start, and he, too, was bearing to the left.

He was making for a narrow strip of timber, evidently thinking he would have a chance for his life if he could once get under cover of the trees.

As the two villains who were making for the same point were well off to the left, they would be able to reach it about the same time Wild did.

Cheyenne Charlie and the rest did not notice them until they were a good five hundred yards away.

The scout was the first to see them, and he called the attention of Jack and Jim.

"Them fellers mean to drop Wild, I guess," he said. "Come, Jack, you an' me will go after 'em and give 'em what they're lookin' for."

"I'll go, too," spoke up Dart.

"No; two of us is enough. It will be fair play, then. You stay here an' look after the women folks."

As Charlie said this he sprang into the saddle and darted away, followed by Robedee.

About half the people in the crowd noticed this sudden movement on the part of the two, and they turned their gaze after them.

They saw what was up.

Seeing that several were moving for their horses, evidently to join in the pursuit, Dove-Eye Dave ran out and cried:

"Don't, boys! It is even up. Let ther boys from Weston fight it out. If them two fellers are lookin' for blood, they will git more than they want of it."

This expressed the sentiment of the crowd, and others expostulated until the anxious ones gave up the idea.

But a number of the cowboys followed along slowly, so as to be near when the fight started.

Meanwhile Young Wild West was covering the ground rapidly.

Spitfire was a much better horse than the one ridden by Fancy Phil, and he was gaining perceptibly.

Wild now saw the other two villains riding to head him off and assist Fancy Phil to escape.

"I am sorry I haven't my rifle," the brave boy muttered. "But just wait till I get a little nearer! I'll try my revolver on them."

He had scarcely expressed himself when he saw one of the villains raise a rifle and turn in the saddle.

He was a good four hundred yards off, but he was going to try a shot.

Our hero watched for the puff of smoke, and the instant he saw it he dropped his head and hit the sorrel at the same time.

The horse leaped forward like a shot out of a gun and the bullet went through the air fully three feet behind Wild.

Spitfire was not used to being struck by his master; hence the wonderful leap.

It astonished him so that he became frightened, and was now running faster than ever.

While Wild was trying to tame him down a trifle another shot rang out.

The man who had fired at him and missed threw up his hands and fell from the saddle just as he was about to fire again.

Then for the first time Young Wild West saw Cheyenne Charlie and Jack Robedee coming.

A confident smile broke over his face.

"I wouldn't care if there were half a dozen of them," he thought. "I don't know whether it was Charlie or Jack who fired that shot, but it was a great one, for it must have been eight or nine hundred yards."

Fancy Phil was now getting close to the strip of timber.

He was urging his horse forward as fast as the animal could cover the ground.

He had a revolver with five chambers loaded.

Our hero knew this.

If he could get behind a tree after dismounting in the woods, he might prove a rather dangerous customer.

But Wild did not think he would be dangerous.

He would have the same show, and if he could not win out when the chances were even he did not want to win.

Fancy Phil was a cowardly cur, and he was nearly crazed from the quantities of liquor he had swallowed to get his courage up.

Slowly but surely the young Prince of the Saddle gained on him.

In another minute the villain would reach the timber.

And the remaining horseman would be there at the same time.

Wild kept his eyes on both of them.

Just as the fellow who was trying so hard to assist Fancy Phil reached the edge of the timber another rifle shot sounded.

It came from Jack Robedee, and the bullet flew straight to its mark.

It struck the man in the shoulder, and he tumbled from his steed and rolled over on the ground, badly wounded, but not dead.

"Ah!" exclaimed Wild. "they are leaving Fancy Phil to me. That is what I want."

The fleeing villain was now rendered desperate

He let out a yell of defiance when he got into the woods and promptly dismounted.

But our hero never slackened his pace a bit.

He was bearing straight upon the villain, who had taken his position behind a tree.

He was depending upon making a sure shot when he fired, and Young Wild West did not intend to fire till he got a chance to cover his man.

He was lying close to the sorrel's neck now, his revolver on a level with the tree.

When within fifty yards of the edge of the timber his keen eye saw Fancy Phil's hand show at the side of the tree.

The next instant two shots rang out.

Fancy Phil fired the first one, and missed his mark by several feet.

Young Wild West fired the other, and he did not miss his mark.

His bullet struck the hand that had directed the shot at him, and the villain behind the tree dropped the weapon with a howl of pain.

His wrist had been broken.

But he was game, as a coward can sometimes be when he is cornered.

He reached over and grabbed the revolver from the ground with his left hand.

Our hero allowed him to do this, dismounting while it was being done.

"Fancy Phil!" he cried, "you want my life awful bad, it seems. You are the worst man I ever met, white or red, and I am going to drop you, so say your prayers!"

"Not yet!" was the reply.

With that he fired a shot with his left hand.

But he exposed himself more than he thought, and even as the bullet whistled past his head, Young Wild West fired at him.

That wound up the chase.

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

As Fancy Phil fell Young Wild West turned and rode slowly back to the judges' stand.

"Gentlemen, it is all over," he said. "Weston can't be beat, and that is all there is to it."

"Three cheers for Young Wild West!" cried some one in the crowd.

Our hero had been cheered often before.

But never so many voices as now rang in his ears.

He had not only won the great match that so much money had been wagered on, but he had won the hearts of the people so well.

Our friends had intended to go back to Weston that night, but the people prevailed on them to stay and attend the dance that was to be given.

Wild consented, so the whole crowd stayed.

The feelings of the committee were somewhat dampened by the sudden death of the chairman, but they made the best of it, as they do in that part of the country, and tried to make things pleasant for the victorious contingent from Weston.

That night Young Wild West and Arietta Murdock led the grand march at the dance.

Everybody wanted to see them, and there was an awful crowd present.

They danced the first set, and then Wild excused himself and went off to look for Charlie, who was missing.

He thought probably the scout had got into bad company and might be taking too much whiskey for his good.

Wild made for a barroom that was across the wide hall of the building, and as he did so a dark figure crept from a corner and started after him.

There was a gleaming knife in the man's hand, which plainly told that he was on murder bent.

Like a snake the scoundrel crept upon the unsuspecting boy.

As he crept along a ray of light from the ballroom suddenly struck his face.

It was Silas Hodge.

The man had become drunk from trying to drown his troubles, and had determined to kill Young Wild West, whom he deemed as the cause of them all.

The villain had really loved Dodger Dan like a brother, and he meant to make up with him after the money had been lost or won.

He had seen Wild shoot him, and that was sufficient to make him want revenge.

He had been watching for his time for two solid hours, and now it had come.

Nerving himself, the dastardly scoundrel leaped forward to plunge the gleaming knife into the heart of Young Wild West.

Sometimes there is a premonition that comes to a person when in great danger, and it must have been that way with our hero.

At any rate he turned just in time to see the man leaping toward him.

He very quickly stepped aside, and then knocked the crazed fellow down with his fist.

Before Silas Dodge could recover himself Wild had him pinned to the floor.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as he saw who it was, "so you have played your last card and lost, have you? Well, I suppose this dance will wind up with a grand hanging. Get upon your feet, Silas Hodge."

The villain obeyed, letting the knife drop to the floor.

"Pick that up!" was the stern command.

Tremblingly Hodge obeyed.

The muzzle of a revolver almost touched his forehead, and he dared not refuse.

"Now, then, march into that ballroom!"

He hesitated, but a touch from the cold muzzle of the shooter started him forward.

With measured tread Wild marched him into the ballroom, and the moment the two entered the music ceased.

"Ladies and gentlemen," said Wild, "here is the last of the three who have tried so hard to kill me to-day. I turned in the nick of time, as I was going through the hall, for he was just going to stab me from behind with the knife he has in his hand. What shall be done with such a man as he is?"

"Hang him!" came from the lips of every man present, and some of the women, too.

Hodge cast an appealing look around him.

But not a look of sympathy did he see.

He had tried to assassinate Young Wild West, and that was enough to make the crowd feel like tearing him to pieces.

Realizing that he was a doomed man, he suddenly became imbued with a feeling of extreme desperation.

With a supreme superhuman effort he tore himself free from the grasp of the angry men and made a bolt for the door.

Even Wild did not expect such a move, and before he could be stopped, the villain was out into the hall.

He reached the door leading into the street and was out in a jiffy.

It happened that a horse was hitched to a post right there, and cutting the animal loose, Hodge leaped upon his back and rode away with the speed of the wind.

Half a dozen shots were fired at him by the men as they rushed from the ballroom.

But luck was with the desperate villain just then, it appeared, for not one of them touched him.

"I will run him down," exclaimed Wild, as he ran to get his horse. "I caught Fancy Phil, and I guess I can catch him."

Silas Hodge was heading for the road that led to Weston, and as it took our hero some little time to get his handsome

Wild had no sooner gone in pursuit when a number of others followed.

Among them were Cheyenne Charlie and Dove-Eye Dave.

The old man was supple as any of them in mounting, and with a yell he rode down the street.

"Whoopee! Whoopee!" cried Cheyenne Charlie. "Come ahead, boys, an' see ther finish of ther sneakin' coyote who tried to kill Young Wild West."

Shouts of approval went up from all sides.

There was not one within hearing of the scout's voice who doubted that Young Wild West would run down the cowardly fellow who had come so near stabbing him in the dark.

Wild was so far ahead of Charlie and the rest that the clatter of his horse's hoofs could just be heard.

"He'll catch him, all right," Charlie said to Jack Robedee. "It won't take him long to do it, either, unless ther coyote has got a mighty good horse."

"Oh, I guess he'll catch him, good horse or bad horse," was the retort. "Wild has never missed catchin' his man, an' it ain't likely he'll do it this time."

"Whoopee! Hooray! Hurro-o-oo!"

The pursuing horsemen were letting themselves loose now.

It seemed as though they were simply yelling to let the cowardly fugitive know that they meant to get him.

Wild had not been riding more than two minutes when he caught sight of the man he was pursuing.

It seemed that Hodge had become confused in some manner, and rode back to take a road for the open prairie beyond.

That made him lose his big lead.

And just as he was turning up the other road, which was not much more than a trail, our hero came in sight of him.

The moon was just rising, and by its silvery light Wild saw Silas Hodge plainly.

But he did not open his mouth.

He knew if he cried out for him to halt he would only ride all the faster in his effort to escape.

"I guess I will take him back alive," thought the boy. "The people there have set their hearts on hanging the scoundrel. If ever a man deserved hanging, this one does, and I am not going to try and prevent them from doing it."

Young Wild West was just as sure of catching his man now as he was that the moon was showing him the way to ride.

But he was cautious, just the same, for he knew the villain must have something more than the knife he had tried to stab him in the back with.

He had not taken the precaution to disarm him when he forced him to walk into the ballroom, and that was where he had made a slight mistake.

Therefore he would have to look out for him.

It might be that Hodge was a poor shot; but a chance shot is sometimes the one that does the business.

The fugitive was now riding over a level stretch of land that was interspersed with short, stubby bushes.

He had left the trail and was making for a clump of trees.

Wild saw what he was trying for and he resolved that he would never reach the trees.

A word to Spitfire, and he began to gain more rapidly.

The final spurt in the race had begun.

Suddenly our hero raised his revolver and sent a bullet whizzing past the villain's head.

He had not tried to hit him; he simply wanted to draw him on and get him to return the shot.

If he could get him to empty his revolver the capture could be made without much difficulty.

Hodge dodged in a frightened way as he heard the singing of the bullet, and then he turned and did exactly what the boy wanted him to do.

He fired two shots, both of them going wide of the mark, because Wild swerved to the left when he anticipated what he was going to do.

But the Prince of the Saddle fired again.

This time the bullet cut a lock of hair from Hodge's head.

But it did more than that, for the villain dodged and lost his balance.

His left foot catching in one of the bushes.

Over the ground he was dragged in a way that would surely not have occurred if the horse was not stopped very suddenly.

"I must have missed," said Wild to himself. "Well, I suppose I might have made a mistake of an inch. I aimed at his head. I'll see where I did hit him."

Impeded by the lagging body, the horse ahead slackened speed a trifle.

The next instant Spitfire was at its side and Wild had seized the bridle rein.

It was the work of but a second or two to bring the animal to a halt.

Then he dismounted and found that Silas Hodge was not hurt at all.

The villain had dropped his revolver when he tumbled from the saddle, but he still had the knife that Wild had made him pick up when he had dropped it after being foiled in his attempt to kill the boy.

"I know you, Young Wild West," he hissed. "You have driven me to the last ditch! I am like a rat in a corner, and I am going to fight for my life."

"You had better not, Silas Hodge," was the calm retort. "You had better surrender quietly and let me take you back into town. You cannot escape now, and you know it. If you put up a fight I will easily defeat you, and most likely kill you."

"Will you give me a chance for my life?" asked the villain in an eager tone.

"Do you think I ought to?"

"Yes! You are said to be honest, manly and generous; now, give me a show for my life. I hear your friends galloping to this spot, but you can easily make them let me alone."

"I can give you a show for your life in but one way."

"And what way is that?"

"Defend yourself!"

With that Young Wild West drew his hunting knife and made out as if he was going to stab the villain to the heart.

Hodge knew what his chance was, and he was going to make the best of it.

He could hear the horsemen rapidly nearing the place, and he knew his only chance was to kill Young Wild West, and kill him quick.

He went into the fight with a feeling of desperation and despair.

Clash! Clash!

The tempered steel blades came together in the air and sparks of fire flew.

Hodge knew something about handling a knife, too, but strive as he might, every thrust he made was cleverly parried.

Young Wild West was simply playing with the villain.

But he did not intend to kill him, though he richly deserved it.

He was going to wait till Cheyenne Charlie and the rest got to the scene and then disarm him.

In the moonlight the two made a thrilling sight.

They circled around, darted back and forth and stepped sidewise in all the motions peculiar to a fight with hunting knives.

Hodge was doing his best to put an end to his youthful opponent, and Wild was simply defending himself.

"Whoopee! A fight, boys!"

It was the voice of Cheyenne Charlie, and the next instant those who had followed Wild in pursuit came galloping up.

"Want any help, Wild?" called out Jack Robedee.

"No! Here he is; I'll turn him over to you!" and with that Wild made a quick lunge and disarmed the villain, sending his knife flying a dozen feet away.

Jack seized Hodge almost before the blade struck the ground.

"Now, I guess we'll have ther hangin', after all," he remarked.

Hodge made just one effort to get away from him, and then he gave up and allowed them to do as they pleased with him.

The admiring friends of Young Wild West yelled themselves hoarse as they rode back to town with the prisoner.

As soon as they got there a judge and jury were found and Silas Hodge was quickly convicted and sentenced to be hanged.

The execution took place at once, but our friends from Weston did not witness it.

They slipped the incident from their minds and went on dancing in the ballroom.

Every one had a good time, and the next day Young Wild West and his friends went back to Weston.

The news of their victories had preceded them. They were warmly received.

The day in Spondulicks had been one of triumph for the handsome young Prince of the Saddle.

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST'S STRATEGY; OR, THE COMANCHE CHIEF'S LAST RAID," which will be the next number (14) of "Wild West Weekly."

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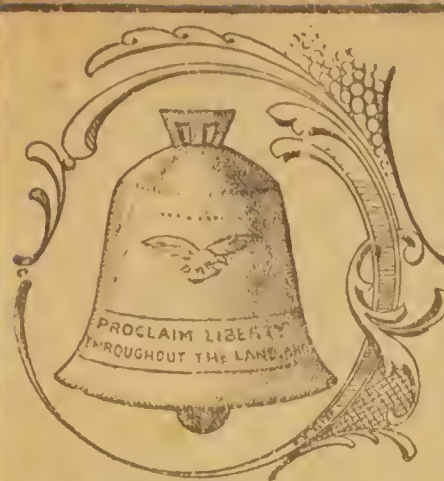
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